

## Executive Summary

### ES.1 Introduction

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Central Coast Field Office<sup>1</sup> (CCFO) has prepared this Draft Resource Management Plan Amendment and Environmental Impact Statement (RMPA/EIS) for Oil and Gas Leasing and Development to analyze the effects of alternative oil and gas management approaches on lands with Federal mineral estate within the CCFO Planning Area. The current management decisions for oil and gas resources are described in the Resource Management Plan for the Southern Diablo Mountain Range and Central Coast of California.

Resource Management Plans (RMPs) are land use plans that establish goals and objectives for resource management and guide land management actions, which are based on the principles of multiple use and sustained yield. Over time, decisions on how the land is managed need to be revised or amended to respond to new, intensified, or changed uses on public land, prompting an RMP revision or amendment. Here, new circumstances and information regarding oil and gas exploration and development, including unconventional reservoirs and well stimulation techniques, have prompted the BLM to prepare this Draft RMPA to the 2007 Hollister Field Office RMP. To support the preparation of this RMPA, the BLM has completed this Draft EIS that provides a comprehensive evaluation of the environmental issues and impacts associated with the Draft RMPA and alternatives.

### ES.2 Planning Area Description

The Planning Area is the geographical boundaries of the CCFO. This includes 6.8 million acres of Federal, State, and private lands across all or portions of the following 12 counties in western-central California:

- |                |                 |               |
|----------------|-----------------|---------------|
| ■ Alameda      | ■ Monterey      | ■ San Mateo   |
| ■ Contra Costa | ■ San Benito    | ■ Santa Clara |
| ■ Fresno       | ■ San Francisco | ■ Santa Cruz  |
| ■ Merced       | ■ San Joaquin   | ■ Stanislaus  |

The CCFO manages public land in 11 of these counties; there are currently no BLM-managed public lands in San Francisco County (see Figure 1-1). Public land parcels vary in size from less than 40 acres to more than 50,000 acres. The most notable holdings are located on the Central Coast at the former Fort Ord military base and in the western San Joaquin Valley.

The Decision Area for the RMPA includes approximately 793,000 acres of BLM-administered subsurface mineral estate underlying public lands or split estate lands within the CCFO Planning Area. Split estate means lands where the surface is owned by an entity or person other than the BLM but the Federal subsurface mineral estate is managed by the BLM. (Onshore Oil and Gas Order No. 1, part II). Split estate leases are included in the Decision Area and would be subject to the oil and gas resource management decisions of the RMPA. “The BLM must comply with NEPA, the National Historic Preservation Act, the Endangered Species Act, and related Federal statutes when authorizing lease operations on split estate lands where the surface is not Federally owned and the oil and gas is Federal.” (Onshore Oil and Gas Order No. 1, part VI). The BLM lands at the Coast Dairies are not a part of the Decision Area because BLM does not manage the mineral estate underlying the Coast Dairies.

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<sup>1</sup> The Central Coast Field Office, currently located in Marina, California, was previously called the Hollister Field Office.

### ES.3 Overall Vision

The overall vision of the RMPA planning effort is to provide a collaborative community based planning approach to update the existing management decisions and resource allocations for oil and gas leases by addressing new data, changing resource conditions, and changes in the use of public land that have occurred since the 2007 Hollister Field Office RMP was completed. The BLM expects that numerous partners and cooperating agencies will become involved in this process and will assist in providing a variety of data in support of this effort.

### ES.4 Purpose and Need for Amending the 2007 Hollister Resource Management Plan

The purpose of this amendment to the 2007 Hollister Field Office RMP is to determine which BLM-managed lands or subsurface Federal minerals are open or closed to oil and gas leasing, and which stipulations or restrictions apply to protect specific resources, based on an analysis of oil and gas exploration and development in excess of levels evaluated in the 2007 RMP. The RMPA would not authorize any actual drilling for exploration or development of oil and gas resources. Actual drilling authorization would be analyzed on a site specific basis dependent on the project specifications before the BLM at that time.

In response to the Hollister litigation and settlement agreement, the BLM developed a new Reasonably Foreseeable Development (RFD) Scenario paying greater attention to the current and future use of well stimulation technologies, including hydraulic fracturing, acid matrix stimulation, and acid fracturing, as well as future uses of enhanced oil recovery (see Appendix B). Because this RFD Scenario forecasts a greater amount of development as compared to the RFD Scenario developed for the 2007 RMP, there is a need to consider whether the land use plan decisions in the 2007 RMP should be adjusted. An RMPA is also needed to address the current and potential future uses of well stimulation technologies, as well as future uses of enhanced oil recovery.

There is also a need to determine appropriate stipulations for the two suspended non-NSO leases referenced in Case No. 11-06174 and the 12 prospective non-NSO leases identified in Case No. 13-01749.<sup>2</sup>

**Decisions to be made:** Through the RMPA, the BLM will identify which lands are open or closed to oil and gas leasing and which stipulations would be applied on oil and gas exploration and development activities in order to protect environmental resources. For the 14 leases subject to the settlement agreement, the determination will be an implementation-level decision; the implementation decision will determine whether the leases should be issued, and if so, whether the current lease stipulations are sufficient or if additional stipulations are needed.

### ES.5 Public Involvement and Agency Cooperation

This document has been prepared with input from interested agencies, organizations, and individuals. Public involvement is a vital component of the Resource Management Planning process and the National Envi-

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<sup>2</sup> The *Center for Biological Diversity v. Bureau of Land Management* (Case No. 11-06174) decision determined that the BLM violated NEPA when it failed to prepare an EIS prior to issuing two non-NSO leases. BLM has agreed to prepare an EIS to analyze and assess the adequacy of proposed stipulations for the non-NSO leases referenced in Case No. 11-06174, and has suspended operations and production on those leases. The BLM has also agreed to not issue and to assess the adequacy of proposed stipulations for 12 prospective non-NSO leases identified in Case No. 13-01749, pending completion of the EIS (*Center for Biological Diversity v. Bureau of Land Management*, 2014).

ronmental Policy Act (NEPA) process for engaging the public in the effort and allowing for full environmental disclosure.

Four public scoping workshops were held in January and February 2014 to initiate the public involvement process for the Central Coast RMPA. BLM's official scoping comment period began August 5, 2013, with the publication of the Notice Of Intent in the Federal Register. The comment period ran for 207 days ending on February 28, 2014, to incorporate the comments received during the public scoping workshops.

Additionally, a social and economic strategies workshop was held to provide an opportunity for local government officials, community leaders, and other citizens to discuss regional economic conditions, trends, and strategies with BLM managers and staff. The workshops assisted in identifying the ways public land resources are integrated into the local economy and way of life and in identifying opportunities for collaborative, stewardship-based management proposals.

Public participation will be ongoing throughout the planning process. The Proposed RMPA/Final EIS will consider all substantive oral and written comments received during the 90-day public comment period for this Draft RMPA/EIS. Members of the public with standing have the opportunity to protest the content of the Proposed RMPA/Final EIS during the specified 30-day protest period. In addition, the public will have the opportunity to comment on implementation level decisions during the 30 days following the release of the Proposed RMPA/Final EIS. A Record of Decision will be issued by the BLM after the release of the Proposed RMPA/Final EIS, the Governor's Consistency Review, and protest resolution.

## ES.6 Planning Issues

In its planning process, the BLM uses the concept of issues and unresolved conflicts, as presented in the NEPA regulations. Issues may include demands for resources, as well as concerns and conflicts, associated with balancing a mix of multiple uses, or unresolved conflicts associated with past, present, and future management of public lands or resources. As part of the scoping process, the BLM solicited comments and concerns from the public, organizations, tribes, and Federal, State, and local agencies, as well as from BLM specialists.

The issues identified during scoping were grouped into broad topics and are summarized below.

- **Water Resources.** What would be the impact of different approaches to oil and gas management, including well stimulation activities, on water resources? What measures will be implemented to protect these resources?
- **Health and Safety.** What would be the impact of different approaches to oil and gas management, including well stimulation activities, on public and worker health and safety? What measures will be implemented to protect the public, workers, and sensitive receptors?
- **Vegetation and Wildlife.** What would be the impact of different approaches to oil and gas management, including well stimulation activities, on plants and wildlife? What measures will be implemented to protect these resources?
- **Air Quality.** What would be the impact of different approaches to oil and gas management, including well stimulation activities, on air quality? What measures will be implemented to protect air quality?
- **Climate Change.** What would be the impact of different approaches to oil and gas management, including well stimulation activities, on climate change and Federal efforts to minimize climate change? What measures will be implemented to minimize contributions to and the impacts of climate change?
- **Geology and Seismicity.** What would be the impact of different approaches to oil and gas management, including well stimulation activities, on geology and induced seismicity? What measures will be implemented to protect geology and mitigate for induced seismicity?

- **Soil Resources.** What would be the impact of different approaches to oil and gas management, including well stimulation activities, on soil resources? What measures will be implemented to protect soil resources?
- **Socioeconomics.** What would be the impact of different approaches to oil and gas management, including well stimulation activities, on the social values and economic revenues of the community? What measures will be implemented to protect these values and revenue sources?
- **Traffic.** What would be the impact of different approaches to oil and gas management, including well stimulation activities, on traffic and local roads? What measures will be implemented to protect local roads and manage increased traffic?
- **Tribal and Cultural Resources.** What would be the impact of different approaches to oil and gas management, including well stimulation activities, on tribal and cultural resources? What measures will be implemented to protect these resources?
- **Environmental Justice.** What would be the impact of different approaches to oil and gas management, including well stimulation activities, on poor, minority, and underrepresented communities? What measures will be implemented to protect these communities from experiencing disproportionate negative effects from oil and gas development?
- **Land Use.** What would be the impact of different approaches to oil and gas management, including well stimulation activities, on existing land uses? What measures will be implemented to protect existing land uses?
- **Livestock Grazing.** What would be the impact of different approaches to oil and gas management, including well stimulation activities, on existing livestock grazing operations? What measures will be implemented to protect these operations?
- **Recreation.** What would be the impact of different approaches to oil and gas management, including well stimulation activities, on visitor experience and the safety of existing lands and water bodies used for recreation? What measures will be implemented to protect recreational resources?
- **Visual Resources.** What would be the impact of different approaches to oil and gas management, including well stimulation activities, on visual resources? What measures will be implemented to protect these resources?

## Alternative Comments

The following scoping issues were identified by BLM as pertaining to the development of alternatives:

- Cancellation of the 2011 and 2012 Central Coast Field Office lease sales that have been litigated.
- Prohibition on all oil and gas activities in areas managed by the Central Coast Field Office including enhanced oil recovery.
- Prohibition on all oil and gas well stimulation activities (e.g., hydraulic fracturing) in areas managed by the Central Coast Field Office.
- Conditions of approval for new drilling permits to prohibit well stimulation technologies.

## General Comments

The following scoping issues were identified by BLM as pertaining to the RMPA/EIS, but were not specific to a particular resource area:

- Address conflicts between the proposed action and the objectives of Federal, regional, State, and local (and in the case of a reservation, Indian tribe) plans and policies.
- Include a list of best management practices (BMPs). Explain the circumstances under which the BMPs would be applied, and how the BLM would ensure that the BMPs would be monitored and enforced.

- Disclose the parties that would be responsible for avoiding, minimizing, and mitigating adverse impacts.
- The impacts analysis should assume that leaks, spills, and human and wildlife contact with fracturing fluid will occur.
- The Reasonably Foreseeable Development Scenario must thoroughly define “reasonably” and “foreseeable.”

## **Issues Discussed at Social and Economic Workshop**

- BLM actions under the RMPA.
- Economic and social conditions within the CCFO Planning Area and the regional focus of the social and economic analysis for the RMPA and EIS given the location of Federal mineral estate within the CCFO Planning Area.
- Community characteristics and social and economic concerns from oil and gas development that should be considered in the social analysis for the RMPA and EIS.
- Areas containing low-income and minority populations in the CCFO Planning Area that would most likely be affected by the RMPA.
- Mitigation measures to minimize the impacts associated with the RMPA.

## **ES.7 Proposed Resource Management Plan Amendment**

The BLM used several sources of input to develop alternatives, including existing decisions in the 2007 Hollister Field Office RMP and the 2015 Reasonably Foreseeable Development (RFD) Scenario. The public scoping process, conducted from August 5, 2013, to February 28, 2014, provided an opportunity for interested members of the public, local governments, and other resource and land management agencies to comment on the planning process and/or management concerns for oil and gas resources. From the comments received, the BLM identified the key planning issues to be addressed in the Draft RMPA/EIS and incorporated them into the range of alternatives. BLM also held a Social and Economic Workshop on February 4, 2015, to solicit input on the effects Federal mineral leasing and development may have on local economic and social goals in the CCFO Planning Area, which was documented in a Social and Economic Workshop Summary Report.

The alternatives described in this chapter represent a range of management options to address the issues identified during scoping and to achieve resource management goals in light of the updated oil and gas RFD Scenario in the CCFO Planning Area.

The EIS impact analysis will also address 14 leases within the CCFO Decision Area that do not contain NSO stipulations (i.e., non-NSO leases), per a July 2014 Federal court settlement agreement to resolve the disputes set forth in Case No. 11-06174 and Case No. 13-1749. While BLM will select a Preferred Alternative as part of its plan-level decision for determining which BLM-managed lands or subsurface Federal minerals are open or closed to oil and gas leasing, the determination for the 14 leases will be an implementation-level decision. For each of the 14 leases, the implementation decision will determine whether the leases should be issued, and if so, whether the current stipulations are sufficient or if additional stipulations are needed.

In 2015, the BLM prepared an updated RFD Scenario to project levels and types of industry activity and the associated surface disturbance that are likely to occur on all mineral estate managed by the BLM in the CCFO Planning Area. The 2015 RFD Scenario is based on known or inferred oil and gas occurrence potential based on California Department of Conservation, Division of Oil, Gas, and Geothermal Resources (DOGGR) records, independent assessments of scientific literature, and knowledge of local experts with experience in the leasing and development of Federal minerals. The lands included are lim-

ited to those with BLM-administered minerals, including split estate with surface estate owned by an entity or person other than the BLM and Federal sub-surface minerals. The 2015 RFD Scenario applies to all alternatives.

Overall, the 2015 RFD Scenario assumes that the current development trends in this region are likely to continue for the next 15 to 20 years. It estimates that during the life of this plan, between zero and 32 development wells could be expected on Federal mineral estate within existing fields in the CCFO Planning Area and three to five exploratory wildcat wells (wells outside of DOGGR’s administrative boundary of existing oil and gas fields) would be drilled on Federal mineral estate in the CCFO Planning Area. Therefore, given the limited extent of area of Federal mineral estate (793,000 acres) within the entire Planning Area (6.8 million acres), it is unlikely that more than a total of 37 exploratory and development wells will be drilled on new Federal oil and gas leases over the next 15 to 20 years. Well stimulation technologies and enhanced oil recovery techniques are assumed to be used on any or all of these wells.

Table ES-1 shows a summary of the acreages for each of the alternatives described below. Table ES-2 summarizes the leases subject to the settlement agreement by each alternative.

**Table ES-1. Acreages of the Alternatives**

	Calculated GIS Acres Open with CSU	Calculated GIS Acres Closed	Calculated GIS Acres Open with NSO
<b>Alternative A (No Action)</b>	683,800	67,500	41,700
<b>Alternative B</b>	39,000	754,000	N/A
<b>Alternative C (Preferred)</b>	368,800	394,400	29,800
<b>Alternative D</b>	121,200	655,400	16,400
<b>Alternative E</b>	487,200	99,400	206,400

**Table ES-2. Summary of Leases Subject to Settlement by Alternative**

	Calculated GIS Acres Open with CSU	Calculated GIS Acres Closed	Calculated GIS Acres Open with NSO
<b>Alternative A (No Action)</b>	17,600	N/A	N/A
<b>Alternative B</b>	3,800	13,800	N/A
<b>Alternative C (Preferred)</b>	17,600	N/A	N/A
<b>Alternative D</b>	4,400	13,200	N/A
<b>Alternative E</b>	10,000	300	7,300

**Alternative A.** Alternative A would continue current management under the existing 2007 Hollister Field Office RMP (BLM, 2007). All Federal mineral estate would be available for oil and gas leasing, except for designated wilderness, wilderness study areas (WSAs), Fort Ord National Monument, and Clear Creek Serpentine Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC), which are closed under the 2007 Hollister Field Office RMP. NSO stipulations would be applied in ACECs and Recreation and Public Purpose (R&PP) leases. The Endangered Species stipulation from the 2007 Hollister Field Office RMP would apply in all areas open to leasing.

Under Alternative A, there would be two subalternatives for the leases. Under Subalternative 1, all of the BLM-managed areas (approximately 17,600 acres) that contain the 14 non-NSO leases, as identified in

Case No. 11-06174 and Case No. 13-1749, would be open to leasing. The Endangered Species stipulation from the 2007 Hollister Field Office RMP would apply in all areas of the leases.

Under Subalternative 2, the management decisions for Alternative A would still apply, and the BLM-managed areas that contain the 14 non-NSO leases, as identified in Case No. 11-06174 and Case No. 13-1749, would be open to leasing. However, for analysis purposes, the implementation decision would be: (1) that the two non-NSO leases as identified in Case No. 11-06174 should not have been issued; and (2) to not issue the 12 prospective non-NSO leases as identified in Case No. 13-1749.

**Alternative B.** Under Alternative B, Federal mineral estate within the boundaries of oil and gas fields, plus a 0.5-mile buffer defined by DOGGR<sup>3</sup> would be available for leasing. Other areas would be closed to oil and gas leasing. Controlled Surface Use (CSU) stipulations would apply to all lands open to leasing. Because of the limited areas open to leasing in this alternative, only up to 32 development wells would be anticipated to be drilled. No exploratory wildcat wells are anticipated.

Under Alternative B, of the BLM-managed areas that contain the 14 non-NSO leases, as identified in Case No. 11-06174 and Case No. 13-1749, approximately 3,800 acres would be open with CSU stipulations and 13,800 acres would be closed.

**Alternative C.** Under Alternative C, unless currently closed under the 2007 Hollister Field Office RMP, Federal mineral estate would be open to leasing within high oil and gas potential areas or within the boundaries of oil and gas fields, plus a 0.5-mile buffer currently identified by DOGGR, with the exception of core population areas of the giant kangaroo rat in the vicinity of Panoche, Griswold, Tumey, and Ciervo Hills, which are closed to leasing. CSU stipulations would apply to all lands open to leasing. NSO stipulations would apply to some lands open to leasing, including: (1) threatened and endangered species critical habitat; (2) BLM developed recreation and administrative sites; and (3) special status split estate lands (e.g., state parks, county parks, conservation easements, land trusts, and scenic designations).

Under Alternative C, of the BLM-managed areas that contain the 14 non-NSO leases, as identified in Case No. 11-06174 and Case No. 13-1749, approximately 17,600 acres would be open with CSU stipulations.

**Alternative D.** Under Alternative D, unless currently closed under the 2007 Hollister Field Office RMP, Federal mineral estate underlying BLM surface estate would be available for leasing. All BLM split estate lands and the Ciervo Panoche Natural Area (both BLM surface and split estate lands) would be closed to leasing. CSU stipulations would apply to all lands open to leasing. NSO stipulations would be applied in ACECs and R&PP leases.

Under Alternative D, of the BLM-managed areas that contain the 14 non-NSO leases, as identified in Case No. 11-06174 and Case No. 13-1749, approximately 13,200 acres would be closed and 4,400 acres would be open with CSU stipulations.

**Alternative E.** Under Alternative E, unless currently closed under the 2007 Hollister Field Office RMP, Federal mineral estate outside of a California Department of Water Resources Bulletin 118, Groundwater Basin or Sub-basin, would be available for leasing. CSU stipulations would apply to all lands open to leasing. NSO stipulations would apply to some lands open to leasing, including: (1) 12-digit Hydrologic Unit Codes (HUCs) intersecting EPA impaired, perennial surface waters (BLM surface and split estate); (2) 12-digit HUCs intersecting non-impaired, perennial surface waters that intersect split estate; (3) 12-digit HUC subwatersheds with the highest aquatic intactness score; (4) 0.25 miles from non-impaired, perennial surface waters; and (5) 0.25 miles from eligible Wild and Scenic Rivers.

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<sup>3</sup> In the Environmental Impact Report prepared by DOGGR under Senate Bill 4, each oil and gas field includes a buffer area around it within which future activities may occur. Within the CCFO Planning Area, the buffer is 0.5 miles around existing fields. (DOC, 2015 page 5-1)

Under Alternative E, of the BLM-managed areas that contain the 14 non-NSO leases, as identified in Case No. 11-06174 and Case No. 13-1749, approximately 10,000 acres would be open with CSU stipulations, 7,300 acres would be open with NSO, and 300 acres would be closed.

**Preferred Alternative.** Alternative C is the BLM's current Preferred Alternative. This is not a final agency decision, but instead an indication of the agency's preliminary preference. The Proposed RMP may reflect changes or adjustments based on information received during public comment, new information, or changes in BLM policies or priorities. The Proposed RMP may include objectives and actions described in the other analyzed alternatives. For this reason, BLM invites and encourages comments on all alternatives, objectives, and actions described in this Draft RMPA/Draft EIS.

## ES.8 Affected Environment

Detailed description of the affected environment within the CCFO Planning Area is presented in Chapter 3 (Affected Environment). The CCFO Planning Area encompasses about 6.8 million acres throughout San Francisco, Contra Costa, San Mateo, Alameda, San Joaquin, Santa Cruz, Santa Clara, Stanislaus, Monterey, San Benito, Merced, and Fresno Counties. Bounded by the Pacific Ocean to the west and the San Joaquin Valley to the east, elevations range from sea level to over 5,000 feet and major landforms include the Diablo Mountain Range, Salinas Valley, and San Joaquin Valley. Public lands are scattered across the Planning Area in numerous small parcels. This is a region of diverse topography and landscapes and extraordinary biodiversity.

Current oil and gas development is concentrated within a limited area of the CCFO Planning Area. In the last decade, nearly all well development occurred in the Coalinga and Jacalitos oil fields (Fresno County), and the San Ardo and Lynch Canyon oil fields (Monterey County). The Federal share of mineral estate in these fields is approximately nine percent (approximately 8,400 acres of Federal mineral estate out of 91,200 total acres), and as such, the BLM administers little of the mineral estate in this area. Likewise, the Vallecitos oil fields located in San Benito County have very little production that occurs on BLM-administered mineral estate. Exploratory oil wells are not common in the CCFO Planning Area, and historically have been drilled on less than five percent of the leases issued on BLM-administered mineral estate.

The biodiversity is reflected by 88 federally listed or candidate species or distinct population segments that occur within the Planning Area, including 46 plants and 42 animals. Critical habitat for 14 animal species and 13 plant species occurs within the Planning Area. There are 197 additional special status species (137 plant and 60 animal species) that occur within the Planning Area, and 129 of these are designated as BLM sensitive species (100 plant and 29 animal species).

There are a number of Special Management Areas within the CCFO Planning Area including two national monuments, two national trails, two research natural areas, and three areas of critical environmental concern. There are also three wilderness areas and five wilderness study areas.

The diverse land area managed by the CCFO encompasses a vast, cultural resource-rich portion of central California containing many hundreds of prehistoric archaeological sites reflecting an occupation of more than 6,000 years and a diversity of site types throughout the interior as well as along the coast. Though few studies have been conducted for land under the jurisdiction of the CCFO, a wealth of archaeological data has been collected from sites in the Southern Santa Clara Valley, the Monterrey Bay area, the south-central coast of California in San Luis Obispo County, and the great Central Valley which largely consists of the western flanks of the San Joaquin Valley. Additionally, the CCFO Planning Area is underlain by many major significant fossil-bearing units.

Significant population growth is forecasted for all twelve counties. Active oil and gas wells on BLM-administered lands account for only 110 (0.6 percent) of the total 18,229 active wells within the CCFO Planning Area, of which BLM administers 793,000 acres of Federal mineral estate out of a total 6.8



million acres. With respect to the mineral extraction industry, Fresno, Monterey, and San Joaquin Counties contain the most active oil and gas wells within the CCFO Planning Area. Those counties, along with Contra Costa, Merced, and Santa Cruz Counties, have seen significant labor earning growth within the mineral extraction industry between years 2001 and 2012. While contributing significant labor earnings, the mineral extraction employment accounts for only a small percentage of the overall employment within each county.

## **ES.9 Environmental Consequences**

Detailed descriptions of impacts of the four action alternatives are provided in Chapter 4 (Environmental Consequences), along with a discussion of the cumulative impacts. The analysis of all alternatives assumes up to 37 wells would be drilled resulting in an estimated 206 acres of ground disturbance.

Implementation of Alternative A would open the greatest number of acres of Federal mineral estate to potential oil and gas development. This alternative provides the most flexibility for oil and gas drilling. It would have the greatest potential for causing localized air quality impacts to sensitive receptors. The alternative could impact the largest number of groundwater basins assigned a high ranking priority and the largest number of watersheds. It is the least protective of biological resources and has the greatest potential for impacts to National Wild and Scenic Rivers.

Implementation of Alternative B would open the fewest acres of Federal mineral estate to potential oil and gas development. It provides the least flexibility for oil and gas drilling and would substantially limit future wildcat wells. It confines impacts to the public due to risk of upset to the smallest area and would likely have the shortest emergency response times. With Alternative E, it would impact the fewest groundwater basins assigned a high ranking priority and watersheds. It would have the potential to be inconsistent with fewer Visual Resource Management Class objectives and would have the least adverse effects to Special Management Areas and negligible impacts to National Wild and Scenic Rivers.

Implementation of Alternative C would balance open and closed acreages of Federal mineral estate, with almost the same amount of each. It provides more flexibility for oil and gas drilling than Alternatives B and D but less than Alternatives A and E. It is the most protective of threatened and endangered species critical habitat. It has the greatest potential for adverse effects to Special Management Areas.

Implementation of Alternative D would open the second fewest acres of Federal mineral estate to potential oil and gas development and would open no split estate lands, limiting the flexibility for oil and gas drilling. It is the most protective of the Ciervo Panoche Natural Area and the special status species found in that region. It has no potential adverse effects from split estate lands but would limit some of the economic benefits of oil and gas development in certain areas.

Implementation of Alternative E would open the second highest number of acres of Federal mineral estate to potential oil and gas development and would prohibit oil and gas leasing inside of a California Department of Water Resources (DWR) Bulletin 118, Groundwater Basin or Sub-basin. It is the most protective for groundwater resources and with Alternative B, would impact the fewest number of watersheds. It has the potential to be inconsistent with the largest number of Visual Resource Management Classes, including Class I, the most protective class.

## **ES.10 Next Steps**

The comment period on this Draft RMPA/EIS will be 90 days following publication of the BLM's Notice of Availability (NOA) in the Federal Register. After comments are received they will be evaluated. Substantive comments could lead to changes in one or more of the alternatives, or in the analysis of environmental consequences. A Proposed RMPA/Final EIS will then be completed and released for a review period. If protests are received on the Proposed RMPA/Final EIS, they will be reviewed and addressed by the Director of the BLM before a Record of Decision and Approved Plan is released.